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ABSTRACT

Many cooperative civic education projects among U.S. and Central/Eastern European educators have emerged since the end of Communist Party Rule in the former Czechoslovakia. This digest describes a collaborative curriculum development project, Civic Education for the Czech Republic (CECR). The objective of CECR is to revise the existing social studies curricular framework for the third form of secondary schools (ages 17 and 18) by taking particular aim at the overarching objectives for civic education reform started in 1989. The project seeks to develop sample lessons and a teacher's manual that realize this objective and to present suggestions for additional teaching methods. Other CECR components included: (1) an intensive Curriculum Development Workshop held at the University of Iowa and attended by Czech teachers and pedagogical faculty, U.S. curriculum development and civic education specialists, and Iowa secondary social studies teachers; (2) an international Partnership Program; and (3) an evaluation of the final product by Czech and U.S. experts in civic education and curriculum design. (CB)

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CIVIC EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: CURRICULUM REFORM FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

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BY GREGORY E. HAMOT

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Civic Education in the Czech Republic: Curriculum Reform for Democratic Citizenship

by Gregory E. Hamot

The December 1989 election of Vaclav Havel as president was the culminating event in Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution, which overthrew Communist Party rule and reestablished democracy in the former Czechoslovakia for the first time since 1948. On January 1, 1993, the establishment of separate Czech and Slovak Republics marked the start of separate democratic reform movements there.

After more than forty years of Soviet communist ideology as the central theme in teacher education and curriculum development, Czech educational reformers have turned to various Western sources for assistance in reforming civic education. For instance, the Center for Civic Education in Calabasas, California has worked closely with Czech reformers to establish national educational standards for the teaching and learning of civics and government. This work is part of CIVITAS: An International Civic Education Exchange Program, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Another major collaborative curriculum development project is Civic Education for the Czech Republic (CECR), a joint effort between the Institute for Educational Development (IED) of the pedagogical faculty at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic and the University of Iowa College of Education (UICOE). This partnership, funded by the United States Information Agency, began in autumn 1995.

Project Overview. CECR seeks to revise the existing social studies curricular framework for the third form of secondary schools (ages 17 and 18) by taking particular aim at the overarching objectives for civic education reform started in 1989. These objectives include the elimination of Marxist-Leninist perspectives in the historical, philosophical, and social science content of the curriculum; the reintroduction of the study of religion into the curriculum; a renewed study of Czech history, culture, heritage, and geography; and a pedagogical shift from transmitting information to passive students to prompting inquiry and active learning. The purpose of this project is to develop for use by Czech teachers sample lessons that realize these objectives. Accompanying the lessons is a teacher's manual that presents a rationale and suggestions for further use of the teaching methods employed in the new lessons.

As originally designed, CECR included a core component known as the Curriculum Development Workshop. The other two components were a partnership program linked to the Curriculum Development Workshop and an evaluation of the final product by Czech and American experts in civic education and curriculum design.

Curriculum Development Workshop. From August 4 to October 25, 1996, the Curriculum Development Workshop met weekly on the University of Iowa campus. Four Czech teachers and the Assistant Director of IED took part in the twelve-week workshop. The workshop focused on the main task of the project, which was to develop a set of lessons based on active learning strategies that foster democratic skills and attitudes. The content of the lessons centered on five key concepts derived from the existing third-form social studies curriculum: (1) state and government policy; (2) constitutional and local law; (3) free market economics; (4) citizenship and human rights; and (5) the Czech Republic in the global community.

Embedded in the workshop schedule were presentations by eight American curriculum development and civic education specialists. The expertise of these specialists ranged from teaching constitutionalism to general aspects of sound curriculum design.

The Partnership Program. To facilitate the curriculum development task, the American project co-directors chose five UICOE faculty and five secondary social studies teachers from the Iowa City Consolidated School District to work as partners with the Czech participants. The aim of this project component was threefold. First, these partnerships gave the Czech participants a chance to visit schools, school board meetings, and inservice teacher workshops that demonstrated the theoretical aspects of curriculum design and lesson development addressed in the workshop. Second, the Czech participants attended courses taught by the UICOE faculty that exemplified social studies teacher education in the United States. Third, the secondary school teachers and university faculty collaborated with their Czech partners in refining the drafts of the lessons written during the workshop.

Curriculum Evaluation. By the end of their residency at the University of Iowa, the Czech participants had written 61 lessons on 20 topics related to both the civic education reform objectives and the five key concepts of the third-form social studies curriculum noted earlier. These lessons introduced teaching strategies heretofore rarely practiced in the Czech Republic, such as role playing, simulations, educational games, decision trees, civic writing, and cooperative learning. Additionally, some lessons highlighted content areas new to Czech social studies courses, including AIDS awareness, industrial pollution, and civic activism.

The final project component was an evaluation of the materials from both an American and a Czech perspective. In November 1996, a group of American civic education and curriculum development experts and several Czech content

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specialists and pedagogical scholars analyzed and critiqued the lessons. The recommendations for improvement were incorporated into the final draft of the lessons.

Pilot Test, Evaluation, and Revision. In January 1997, Czech and American experts who were involved in the curriculum development conducted a teacher workshop in the Czech Republic. The aim of this workshop was to prepare eight Czech teachers from gymnasium, vocational, and apprenticeship schools throughout the Czech Republic to test the new lessons in a representative sample of Czech secondary schools.

Simultaneously, American and East Central European experts in curriculum evaluation conducted a workshop with Czech researchers on the methods of data collection and analysis required for a systematic evaluation of the new lessons. This component of phase two focuses on an evaluation of knowledge, skill, and attitude outcomes commonly associated with life in a democracy. The researchers are seeking empirical evidence of educational reform through the implementation and evaluation of the draft curriculum by both teachers and students in the sample Czech schools.

Upon completion of the pilot test and evaluation, the reformed curriculum will undergo a final revision for publication. IED will publish the first edition of the lessons for distribution to Czech social studies teachers in the third form.

Advocacy and Dissemination. The second phase of CECR will conclude with a National Workshop on Civic Education for Democracy in Olomouc, a university city in the Czech province of Moravia. During this workshop, scheduled for summer 1997, American and Czech CECR participants will disburse copies of the final product and provide professional development to as many Czech secondary school teachers as possible. The goal is to advocate the reformed curriculum through this workshop so that the greatest number of third-form classes may begin using the lessons as early as autumn 1997.

Conclusion. Given forty-three years of totalitarian communism, it is unreasonable to expect complete democratic educational reform to result from one curriculum development project. CECR, however, represents the kind of project that combines the educational expertise of a developed democracy with the contextual understanding of a transitional democracy in an effort to reform civic education through classroom practice. As Czech teachers begin to implement new curricula for democratic citizenship education, the products generated by CECR offer one opportunity to turn the hope for a democratic citizenry into a reality.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the information provided or requested through Interlibrary Loan.

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